Comparing Cultural and Historical Settings

# **President Cleveland, Where Are You?**

**Short Story by Robert Cormier** 

#### **Aaron's Gift**

Short Story by Myron Levoy

# What would you do for your FAMILY?

#### COMMON CORE

RL5 Analyze how a particular sentence fits into the structure of a text and contributes to the development of the setting.
L4b Use Greek roots as clues to the meaning of a word.

The word family means different things to different people. It might mean parents, siblings, cousins, or grandparents. It can also mean close, trusted friends. Although you may not always understand or agree with the people you call family, you are there for them in times of need, and they are there for you. In each of the two stories you are about to read, a boy does something nice for someone in his family.

**QUICKWRITE** Think of a time when you helped someone through a hard time or when someone did something special for you. Write a few sentences about that experience.



#### TEXT ANALYSIS: CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

A work's **cultural and historical setting** is not only the particular time and place in which a work takes place, but also refers to the **customs** of the period, or the way people lived at that time. When an author writes about a historical period, the characters will behave, confront issues, and speak in a way that reflects the customs and history of the times.

As you read, look for details that reflect a story's cultural and historical periods. Ask yourself "What situation do the characters face?" Notice the way the cultural and historical setting influences the story.

#### READING STRATEGY: SET A PURPOSE FOR READING

Your **purpose**, or reason, for reading the following two stories is to find the similarities and differences between their cultural and historical settings. After reading the first story, begin filling in a chart like the one below.

|                              | "President Cleveland,<br>Where Are You?" | "Aaron's<br>Gift" |
|------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Time and Place               |  |                   |
| Details of Historical Period |  |                   |
| Characters' Behavior         |  |                   |
|                              |  |                   |

**Review: Connect** 

#### **▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

Cormier and Levoy use the listed words to help tell the stories of two boys. To see which words you already know, fill in the chart. Then write a sentence using each word you know.

| WORD | allot       | divulge     | obsess    |
|------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| LIST | assassinate | incredulous | skirmish  |
|      | contempt    | massacre    | stalemate |

| Know Well | Think I Know | Don't Know                |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------------|
|           |              |                           |
|           |              | and the constitution with |

# Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

#### **Robert Cormier**

1925-2000

#### **Young Poet**

Robert Cormier was published for the first time at age 12, when a local paper printed some of his poems. Cormier later wrote for a newspaper before becoming one of the first writers to create literature for young adult readers. In his

novels, young heroes who find themselves isolated from friends and adults must struggle with difficult problems on their own.

#### **Myron Levoy**

born 1930

#### **Inspired Writer**

When Myron Levoy was a teenager, he worked at the New York Public Library. There he came across the original manuscript of the poem "Miniver

Cheevy" by Edward
Arlington Robinson. Levoy
had just read the poem
in school, and seeing it
written in the author's
own hand amazed
him. He was inspired to
become a writer
himself.



**Authors Online** 

# PRESIDENT CLEVELAND, Where Are You?

**Robert Cormier** 

That was the autumn of the cowboy cards—Buck Jones and Tom Tyler and Hoot Gibson and especially Ken Maynard. The cards were available in those five-cent packages of gum: pink sticks, three together, covered with a sweet white powder. You couldn't blow bubbles with that particular gum, but it couldn't have mattered less. The cowboy cards were important—the pictures of those rock-faced men with eyes of blue steel.

On those wind-swept, leaf-tumbling afternoons, we gathered after school on the sidewalk in front of Lemire's Drugstore, across from St. Jude's Parochial School, and we swapped and bargained and matched for the cards. Because a Ken Maynard serial<sup>2</sup> was playing at the Globe every Saturday afternoon, he was the most popular cowboy of all, and one of his cards was worth at least ten of any other kind. Rollie Tremaine had a treasure of thirty or so, and he guarded them jealously. He'd match you for the other cards, but he risked his Ken Maynards only when the other kids threatened to leave him out of the competition altogether.

You could almost hate Rollie Tremaine. In the first place, he was the only son of Auguste Tremaine, who operated the Uptown Dry Goods Store, and he did not live in a tenement but in a big white birthday cake of a house on Laurel Street. He was too fat to be effective in the football games between

#### CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Reread lines 1–7. What do you learn about the cultural and historical setting in this paragraph?

#### Analyze Visuals

Examine the photograph. What can you **infer** about the boys?

Buck Jones ... Kent Maynard: well-known movie cowboys who developed their skills in rodeos
and Wild West shows or as stuntmen.

<sup>2.</sup> serial (sîr'ē-əl): a movie appearing in weekly parts.



the Frenchtown Tigers and the North Side Knights, and he made us constantly aware of the jingle of coins in his pockets. He was able to stroll into Lemire's and casually select a quarter's worth of cowboy cards while the rest of us watched, aching with envy.

Once in a while I earned a nickel or dime by running errands or washing windows for blind old Mrs. Belander, or by finding pieces of copper, brass, and other valuable metals at the dump and selling them to the junkman. The coins clutched in my hand, I would race to Lemire's to buy a cowboy card or two, hoping that Ken Maynard would stare boldly out at me as I opened the pack. At one time, before a disastrous matching session with Roger Lussier (my best friend, except where the cards were involved), I owned five Ken Maynards and considered myself a millionaire, of sorts.

One week I was particularly lucky; I had spent two afternoons washing floors for Mrs. Belander and received a quarter. Because my father had worked a full week at the shop, where a rush order for fancy combs had been received, he **allotted** my brothers and sisters and me an extra dime along with the usual ten cents for the Saturday-afternoon movie. Setting aside the movie fare, I found myself with a bonus of thirty-five cents, and I then planned to put Rollie Tremaine to shame the following Monday afternoon.

Monday was the best day to buy the cards because the candy man stopped at Lemire's every Monday morning to deliver the new assortments. There was nothing more exciting in the world than a fresh batch of card boxes. I rushed home from school that day and hurriedly changed my clothes, eager to set off for the store. As I burst through the doorway, letting the screen door slam behind me, my brother Armand blocked my way. ①

He was fourteen, three years older than I, and a freshman at Monument High School. He had recently become a stranger to me in many ways—indifferent to such matters as cowboy cards and the Frenchtown Tigers—and he carried himself with a mysterious dignity that was fractured now and then when his voice began shooting off in all directions like some kind of vocal fireworks.<sup>3</sup>

"Wait a minute, Jerry," he said. "I want to talk to you." He motioned me out of earshot of my mother, who was busy supervising the usual after-school **skirmish** in the kitchen.

I sighed with impatience. In recent months Armand had become a figure of authority, siding with my father and mother occasionally. As the oldest son, he sometimes took advantage of his age and experience to issue rules and regulations.



allot (ə-lŏt') v. to parcel out; distribute

#### B CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Reread lines 25–40. What details in these lines reveal that cowboy cards and movies were important?

**skirmish** (skûr'mĭsh) *n*. a minor battle or conflict

his voice ... vocal fireworks: Because Armand's voice is changing, its pitch varies unexpectedly from high
to low.

"How much money have you got?" he whispered.

"You in some kind of trouble?" I asked, excitement rising in me as I remembered the blackmail plot of a movie at the Globe a month before.

He shook his head in annoyance. "Look," he said, "it's Pa's birthday tomorrow. I think we ought to chip in and buy him something . . ."

I reached into my pocket and caressed the coins. "Here," I said carefully, pulling out a nickel. "If we all give a nickel, we should have enough to buy him something pretty nice."

He regarded me with <u>contempt</u>. "Rita already gave me fifteen cents, and I'm throwing in a quarter. Albert handed over a dime—all that's left 70 of his birthday money. Is that all you can do—a nickel?"

"Aw, come on," I protested. "I haven't got a single Ken Maynard left, and I was going to buy some cards this afternoon."

"Ken Maynard!" he snorted. "Who's more important—him or your father?"

His question was unfair because he knew that there was no possible choice—"my father" had to be the only answer. My father was a huge man who believed in the things of the spirit. . . . He had worked at the Monument Comb Shop since the age of fourteen; his booming laugh—or grumble—greeted us each night when he returned from the factory.

80 A steady worker when the shop had enough work, he quickened with gaiety on Friday nights and weekends . . . and he was fond of making long speeches about the good things in life. In the middle of the Depression, for instance, he paid cash for a piano, of all things, and insisted that my twin sisters, Yolande and Yvette, take lessons once a week.

I took a dime from my pocket and handed it to Armand.

"Thanks, Jerry," he said. "I hate to take your last cent."

"That's all right," I replied, turning away and consoling myself with the thought that twenty cents was better than nothing at all.

hen I arrived at Lemire's, I sensed disaster in the air. Roger Lussier was kicking disconsolately at a tin can in the gutter, and Rollie Tremaine sat sullenly on the steps in front of the store.

"Save your money," Roger said. He had known about my plans to splurge on the cards.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"There's no more cowboy cards," Rollie Tremaine said. "The company's not making any more."

**contempt** (ken-tĕmpt') *n*. the feeling produced by something disgraceful or worthless: scorn

# CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

This story takes place during the Great
Depression of the 1930s, when many businesses failed and many people were out of work.
Reread lines 75–84. How does the description of Jerry's father reflect the issues families confronted during the Great Depression?

<sup>4.</sup> **Depression:** During the 1930s, the United States suffered an economic crisis known as the Great Depression. Banks and businesses all over the country were forced to close, and poverty and unemployment were widespread.

"They're going to have President cards," Roger said, his face twisting with disgust. He pointed to the store window. "Look!"

A placard in the window announced: "Attention, Boys. Watch for the New Series. Presidents of the United States. Free in Each 5-Cent Package of Caramel Chew."

"President cards?" I asked, dismayed.

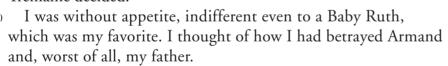
I read on: "Collect a Complete Set and Receive an Official Imitation Major League Baseball Glove, Embossed with Lefty Grove's<sup>5</sup> Autograph."

Glove or no glove, who could become 110 excited about Presidents, of all things?

Rollie Tremaine stared at the sign. "Benjamin Harrison, for crying out loud," he said. "Why would I want Benjamin Harrison when I've got twenty-two Ken Maynards?"

I felt the warmth of guilt creep over me. I jingled the coins in my pocket, but the sound was hollow. No more Ken Maynards to buy.

"I'm going to buy a Mr. Goodbar," Rollie Tremaine decided.



"I'll see you after supper," I called over my shoulder to Roger as I hurried away toward home. I took the shortcut behind the church, although it involved leaping over a tall wooden fence, and I zigzagged recklessly through Mr. Thibodeau's garden, trying to outrace my guilt. I pounded up the steps and into the house, only to learn that Armand had already taken Yolande and Yvette uptown to shop for the birthday present.

I pedaled my bike furiously through the streets, ignoring the indignant horns of automobiles as I sliced through the traffic. Finally I saw Armand and my sisters emerge from the Monument Men's Shop. My heart sank when I spied the long, slim package that Armand was holding.

"Did you buy the present yet?" I asked, although I knew it was too late. "Just now. A blue tie," Armand said. "What's the matter?"
"Naching." I and in I may be at housing.

"Nothing," I replied, my chest hurting.



Whelan's Drug Store, 44th Street and Eighth Avenue, Manhattan (February 7, 1936), Berenice Abbott.



Reread lines 123–132.
Jerry is suddenly concerned about finding his brother. Do you think Jerry's feelings are those that a reallife person would have in the same situation?
Explain your answer.

<sup>5.</sup> Lefty Grove's: belonging to Lefty Grove, a Hall of Fame pitcher for the Philadelphia A's (Athletics) and the Boston Red Sox between 1925 and 1941.

He looked at me for a long moment. At first his eyes were hard, but then they softened. He smiled at me, almost sadly, and touched my arm. I turned away from him because I felt naked and exposed.

"It's all right," he said gently. "Maybe you've learned something."
140 The words were gentle, but they held a curious dignity, the dignity remaining even when his voice suddenly cracked on the last syllable.

I wondered what was happening to me, because I did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Sister Angela was amazed when, a week before Christmas vacation, everybody in the class submitted a history essay worthy of a high mark—in some cases as high as A minus. (Sister Angela did not believe that anyone in the world ever deserved an A.) She never learned—or at least she never let on that she knew—we all had become experts on the Presidents because of the cards we purchased at Lemire's. Each card contained a picture of a President and, on the reverse side, a summary of his career. We looked at those cards so often that the biographies imprinted themselves on our minds without effort. Even our street-corner conversations were filled with such information as the fact that James Madison was called "The Father of the Constitution," or that John Adams had intended to become a minister.

The President cards were a roaring success, and the cowboy cards were quickly forgotten. In the first place, we did not receive gum with the cards, but a kind of chewy caramel. The caramel could be tucked into a corner of your mouth, bulging your cheek in much the same manner as wads of tobacco bulged the mouths of baseball stars. In the second place, 160 the competition for collecting the cards was fierce and frustrating—fierce because everyone was intent on being the first to send away for a baseball glove and frustrating because although there were only thirty-two Presidents, including Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the variety at Lemire's was at a minimum. When the deliveryman left the boxes of cards at the store each Monday, we often discovered that one entire box was devoted to a single President—two weeks in a row the boxes contained nothing but Abraham Lincolns. One week Roger Lussier and I were the heroes of Frenchtown. We journeyed on our bicycles to the North Side, engaged three boys in a matching bout, and returned with five new Presidents, 170 including Chester Alan Arthur, who up to that time had been missing.

Perhaps to sharpen our desire, the card company sent a sample glove to Mr. Lemire, and it dangled, orange and sleek, in the window. I was half sick with longing, thinking of my old glove at home, which I had inherited from

#### Language Coach

Word Origins Many English words contain roots and affixes that are derived from older languages. The word biography (line 151) comes from the Greek words bio, meaning "life," and graphein, meaning "to write." How does this word origin give you a clue to the meaning of the word biography?

COMMON CORE L4b

Franklin Delano Roosevelt: president of the United States from 1933 to 1945; president at the time of this story.

Armand. But Rollie Tremaine's desire for the glove outdistanced my own. He even got Mr. Lemire to agree to give the glove in the window to the first person to get a complete set of cards, so that precious time wouldn't be wasted waiting for the postman.

We were delighted at Rollie Tremaine's frustration, especially since he was only a substitute player for the Tigers. Once, after spending fifty cents on cards—all of which turned out to be Calvin Coolidge—he threw them to the ground, pulled some dollar bills out of his pocket, and said, "The heck with it. I'm going to buy a glove!"

"Not that glove," Roger Lussier said. "Not a glove with Lefty Grove's autograph. Look what it says at the bottom of the sign."

We all looked, although we knew the words by heart: "This Glove Is Not For Sale Anywhere."

Rollie Tremaine scrambled to pick up the cards from the sidewalk, pouting more than ever. After that he was quietly **obsessed** with the Presidents, hugging the cards close to his chest and refusing to tell us how many more he needed to complete his set.

I too was obsessed with the cards, because they had become things of comfort in a world that had suddenly grown dismal. After Christmas, a layoff at the shop had thrown my father out of work. He received no paycheck for four weeks, and the only income we had was from Armand's after-school job at the Blue and White Grocery Store—a job he lost finally when business dwindled as the layoff continued.

Although we had enough food and clothing—my father's credit had always been good, a matter of pride with him—the inactivity made my father restless and irritable. . . . The twins fell sick and went to the hospital to have their tonsils removed. My father was confident that he would return to work eventually and pay off his debts, but he seemed to age before our eyes. •

hen orders again were received at the comb shop and he returned to work, another disaster occurred, although I was the only one aware of it. Armand fell in love.

I discovered his situation by accident, when I happened to pick up a piece of paper that had fallen to the floor in the bedroom he and I shared. I frowned at the paper, puzzled.

"Dear Sally, When I look into your eyes the world stands still . . ."

The letter was snatched from my hands before I finished reading it.

"What's the big idea, snooping around?" Armand asked, his face crimson. "Can't a guy have any privacy?"

**obsess** (əb-sĕs') *v*. to occupy the mind of

#### CONNECT

Think about a time when you were competing for something you really wanted. In what way does that experience help you understand how Jerry and his friends are feeling?

#### • CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Reread lines 191–201. How does the situation described in these lines reflect the historical setting?



He had never mentioned privacy before. "It was on the floor," I said. "I didn't know it was a letter. Who's Sally?"

He flung himself across the bed. "You tell anybody and I'll muckalize you," he threatened. "Sally Knowlton."

Nobody in Frenchtown had a name like Knowlton.

"A girl from the North Side?" I asked, incredulous.

He rolled over and faced me, anger in his eyes, and a kind of despair, too.

"What's the matter with that? Think she's too good for me?" he asked. 220 "I'm warning you, Jerry, if you tell anybody . . . "

"Don't worry," I said. Love had no particular place in my life; it seemed an unnecessary waste of time. And a girl from the North Side was so remote that for all practical purposes she did not exist. But I was curious. "What are you writing her a letter for? Did she leave town or something?"

"She hasn't left town," he answered. "I wasn't going to send it. I just felt like writing to her."

I was glad that I had never become involved with love—love that brought desperation to your eyes, that caused you to write letters you did not plan to send. Shrugging with indifference, I began to search in the closet for the 230 old baseball glove. I found it on the shelf, under some old sneakers. The webbing was torn and the padding gone. I thought of the sting I would feel when a sharp grounder slapped into the glove, and I winced.

# incredulous

(ĭn-krĕj'ə-ləs) adj. unbelieving

of Jerry and his friends?

"You tell anybody about me and Sally and I'll—"

"I know. You'll muckalize me."

I did not <u>divulge</u> his secret and often shared his agony, particularly when he sat at the supper table and left my mother's special butterscotch pie untouched. I had never realized before how terrible love could be. But my compassion was short-lived, because I had other things to worry about: report cards due at Eastertime; the loss of income from old Mrs. Belander, who had gone to live with a daughter in Boston; and, of course, the Presidents. •

Because a <u>stalemate</u> had been reached, the President cards were the dominant force in our lives—mine, Roger Lussier's and Rollie Tremaine's. For three weeks, as the baseball season approached, each of us had a complete set—complete except for one President, Grover Cleveland. Each time a box of cards arrived at the store, we hurriedly bought them (as hurriedly as our funds allowed) and tore off the wrappers, only to be confronted by James Monroe or Martin Van Buren or someone else. But never Grover Cleveland, never the man who had been the twenty-second and the twenty-fourth President of the United States. We argued about Grover Cleveland. Should he be placed between Chester Alan Arthur and Benjamin Harrison as the twenty-second President, or did he belong between Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley as the twenty-fourth President? Was the card company playing fair? Roger Lussier brought up a horrifying possibility—did we need two Grover Clevelands to complete the set?

Indignant, we stormed Lemire's and protested to the harassed storeowner, who had long since vowed never to stock a new series. Muttering angrily, he searched his bills and receipts for a list of rules.

"All right," he announced. "Says here you only need one Grover Cleveland to finish the set. Now get out, all of you, unless you've got money to spend."

Outside the store, Rollie Tremaine picked up an empty tobacco tin and scaled it across the street. "Boy," he said. "I'd give five dollars for a Grover Cleveland."

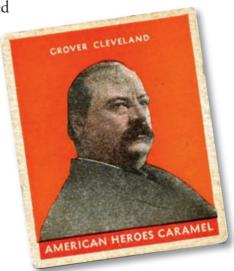
When I returned home, I found Armand sitting on the piazza<sup>7</sup> steps, his chin in his hands. His mood of dejection mirrored my own, and I sat down beside him. We did not say anything for a while.

"Want to throw the ball around?" I asked. He sighed, not bothering to answer. **divulge** (dĭ-vŭlj') v. to reveal, especially something private or secret

#### **G** CONNECT

Reread lines 235–240. Are Jerry's concerns similar or different to concerns of boys his age today? Explain.

stalemate (stāl'māt') n. a situation in which no one playing a game is able to win



<sup>7.</sup> piazza (pē-ăz'ə): a porch or balcony, usually with a roof.

"You sick?" I asked.

He stood up and hitched up his trousers, pulled at his ear, and finally told me what the matter was—there was a big dance next week at the high school, the Spring Promenade, and Sally had asked him to be her escort.

I shook my head at the folly of love. "Well, what's so bad about that?"

"How can I take Sally to a fancy dance?" he asked desperately. "I'd have to buy her a corsage . . . And my shoes are practically falling apart. Pa's got too many worries now to buy me new shoes or give me money for lowers for a girl."

I nodded in sympathy. "Yeah," I said. "Look at me. Baseball time is almost here, and all I've got is that old glove. And no Grover Cleveland card yet . . . "

"Grover Cleveland?" he asked. "They've got some of those up on the North Side. Some kid was telling me there's a store that's got them. He says they're looking for Warren G. Harding."

"Holy smoke!" I said. "I've got an extra Warren G. Harding!" Pure joy sang in my veins. I ran to my bicycle, swung into the seat—and found that the front tire was flat.

"I'll help you fix it," Armand said.

310

Within half an hour I was at the North Side Drugstore, where several boys were matching cards on the sidewalk. Silently but blissfully I shouted: President Grover Cleveland, here I come! (1)

A fter Armand had left for the dance, all dressed up as if it were Sunday, the small green box containing the corsage under his arm, I sat on the railing of the piazza, letting my feet dangle. The neighborhood was quiet because the Frenchtown Tigers were at Daggett's Field, practicing for the first baseball game of the season.

I thought of Armand and the ridiculous expression on his face when he'd stood before the mirror in the bedroom. I'd avoided looking at his new black shoes. "Love," I muttered.

Spring had arrived in a sudden stampede of apple blossoms and fragrant breezes. Windows had been thrown open and dust mops had banged on the sills all day long as the women busied themselves with housecleaning. I was puzzled by my lethargy. Wasn't spring supposed to make everything bright and gay?

I turned at the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Roger Lussier greeted me with a sour face.

"I thought you were practicing with the Tigers," I said.

"Rollie Tremaine," he said. "I just couldn't stand him." He slammed his

COMMON CORE RL5

# CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Setting is not simply a mention of the time and place. To make a setting believable, writers include details that reflect the ways people actually behaved during that time. For instance. Armand writes a letter to Sally, a romantic interest (line 208). This detail is representative of the cultural setting at the time. In modernday stories, characters in a similar situation may call each other on their cell phones or communicate via e-mail or text message. Reread lines 269-292. Which details in these lines help develop the cultural setting of the story? Identify at least two details that would be out of the place in a story with a modern setting. Give reasons for your response.

fist against the railing. "Jeez, why did he have to be the one to get a Grover Cleveland? You should see him showing off. He won't let anybody even touch that glove. . . ."

I felt like Benedict Arnold<sup>8</sup> and knew that I had to confess what I had done.

"Roger," I said, "I got a Grover Cleveland card up on the North Side. I sold it to Rollie Tremaine for five dollars."

"Are you crazy?" he asked.

"I needed that five dollars. It was an—an emergency."

"Boy!" he said, looking down at the ground and shaking his head. "What did you have to do a thing like that for?"

I watched him as he turned away and began walking down the stairs. "Hey, Roger!" I called.

He squinted up at me as if I were a stranger, someone he'd never seen before.

"What?" he asked, his voice flat.

"I had to do it," I said. "Honest."

He didn't answer. He headed toward the fence, searching for the board we had loosened to give us a secret passage.

I thought of my father and Armand and Rollie Tremaine and Grover Cleveland and wished that I could go away someplace far away. But there was no place to go.

Roger found the loose slat in the fence and slipped through. I felt betrayed: Weren't you supposed to feel good when you did something fine and noble?

A moment later, two hands gripped the top of the fence and Roger's face appeared. "Was it a real emergency?" he yelled.

"A real one!" I called. "Something important!"

His face dropped from sight and his voice reached me across the yard: 340 "All right."

"See you tomorrow!" I yelled.

I swung my legs over the railing again. The gathering dusk began to soften the sharp edges of the fence, the rooftops, the distant church steeple. I sat there a long time, waiting for the good feeling to come.

#### Language Coach

Oral Fluency Jerry and Roger do not follow all the rules of formal English in their speech. With a partner, read the conversation in lines 308–326 aloud. Use an appropriate, casual tone.

#### CONNECT

What connection can you make that helps you understand how Jerry is feeling?

<sup>8.</sup> Benedict Arnold: an American general who became a traitor to his country during the Revolutionary War.

#### Comprehension

- **1. Recall** Why is each of the boys eager to gather a complete set of President cards?
- **2. Recall** What is the name of the drugstore where the Frenchtown boys usually buy the President cards?
- 3. Clarify How does Jerry get the Grover Cleveland card?

#### **Text Analysis**

- **4. Make Inferences** When Jerry finds that his brother and sisters already bought their father's gift, Armand says to Jerry, "It's all right. Maybe you've learned something." What might Jerry have learned?
- **5. Connect** Think about a time when you were looking forward to something. Why do you think the narrator is so excited about the new Cowboy cards?
  - **6. Draw Conclusions** At the end, Jerry says "I sat there for a long time, waiting for the good feeling to come." Why doesn't he feel good right away? Do you think he eventually will feel good about what he did?
- 7. Analyze Cultural and Historical Setting How does this story portray the lives of people who lived during the Great Depression? What kinds of difficulties did people face at that time?
- 8. Analyze Cultural and Historical Setting Think about the way members of Jerry's family relate to and interact with one another. What characteristics of Jerry's family seem unique to the time period? Back up your response with examples from the text.

#### **Comparing Cultural and Historical Settings**

Now that you have read the story, start filling in your chart. Add information that the author uses to develop the cultural and historical setting.

|                                 | "President Cleveland,<br>Where Are You?" | "Aaron's Gift" |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Time and Place                  | 1930s, during the Great<br>Depression    |                |
| Details of Historical<br>Period |  |                |
| Characters' Behavior            |  |                |
|                                 |  |                |

#### COMMON CORE

**RL5** Analyze how a particular sentence fits into the structure of a text and contributes to the development of the setting.



aron Kandel had come to Tompkins Square Park to roller-skate, for the streets near Second Avenue were always too crowded with children and peddlers and old ladies and baby buggies. Though few children had bicycles in those days, almost every child owned a pair of roller skates. And Aaron was, it must be said, a Class A, triple-fantastic roller skater.

Aaron skated back and forth on the wide walkway of the park, pretending he was an aviator in an air race zooming around pylons, which were actually two lampposts. During his third lap around the racecourse, he noticed a pigeon on the grass, behaving very strangely.

Aaron skated to the line of benches, then climbed over onto the lawn.

The pigeon was trying to fly, but all it could manage was to flutter and turn round and round in a large circle, as if it were performing a frenzied dance. The left wing was only half open and was beating in a clumsy, jerking fashion; it was clearly broken.

Luckily, Aaron hadn't eaten the cookies he'd stuffed into his pocket before he'd gone clacking down the three flights of stairs from his apartment, his skates already on. He broke a cookie into small crumbs and tossed some toward the pigeon. "Here pidge, here pidge," he called. The pigeon spotted the cookie crumbs and, after a moment, stopped thrashing about. It folded its wings as best it could, but the broken wing still stuck half out. Then it strutted over to the crumbs, its head bobbing forth-back, forth-back, as if it were marching a little in front of the rest of the body—perfectly normal, except for that half-open wing which seemed to make the bird stagger sideways every so often.

#### CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

"Aaron's Gift" is set in the early 1900s in a New York City neighborhood populated with immigrants who had fled to the United States. Reread lines 1–5. What details about the cultural and historical setting can you identify in these lines?

#### Analyze Visuals

Examine the painting. What can you **infer** about the people and their location?

<sup>1.</sup> pylons (pī'lŏnz'): towers marking turning points for airplanes in a race.



The pigeon began eating the crumbs as Aaron quickly unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it off. Very slowly, he edged toward the bird, making little kissing sounds like the ones he heard his grandmother make when she fed the sparrows on the back fire escape.

Then suddenly Aaron plunged. The shirt, in both hands, came down like a torn parachute. The pigeon beat its wings, but Aaron held the shirt to the ground, and the bird couldn't escape. Aaron felt under the shirt, gently, and gently took hold of the wounded pigeon.

"Yes, yes, pidge," he said, very softly. "There's a good boy. Good pigeon, good."

Aaron squeezed through an opening between the row of benches and skated slowly out of the park, while holding the pigeon carefully with both hands as if it were one of his mother's rare, precious cups from the old country. How fast the pigeon's heart was beating! Was he afraid? Or did all pigeons' hearts beat fast?

It was fortunate that Aaron was an excellent skater, for he had to skate six blocks to his apartment, over broken pavement and sudden gratings and curbs and cobblestones. But when he reached home, he asked Noreen Callahan, who was playing on the stoop, to take off his skates for him. He would not chance going up three flights on roller skates this time.

"Is he sick?" asked Noreen.

"Broken wing," said Aaron. "I'm gonna fix him up and make him into a carrier pigeon<sup>2</sup> or something."

"Can I watch?" asked Noreen.

"Watch what?"

"The operation. I'm gonna be a nurse when I grow up."

"OK," said Aaron. "You can even help. You can help hold him while I fix him up."

Aaron wasn't quite certain what his mother would say about his newfound pet, but he was pretty sure he knew what his grandmother would think. His grandmother had lived with them ever since his grandfather had died three years ago. And she fed the sparrows and jays and crows and robins on the back fire escape with every spare crumb she could find. In fact, Aaron noticed that she sometimes created crumbs

#### **B** CONNECT

Think of a time you saw an animal in need. Why do you think Aaron decides to help Pidge?

#### VISUAL VOCABULARY



cobblestone (kŏb'əl-stōn') n. a type of stone used to pave roads or walkways

<sup>2.</sup> carrier pigeon: a pigeon trained to carry messages from place to place.

where they didn't exist, by squeezing and tearing pieces of her breakfast roll when his mother wasn't looking.

Aaron didn't really understand his grandmother, for he often saw her by the window having long conversations with the birds, telling them about her days as a little girl in the Ukraine. And once he saw her take her mirror from her handbag and hold it out toward the birds. She told Aaron that she wanted them to see how beautiful they were. Very strange. But 70 Aaron did know that she would love Pidge, because she loved everything.

To his surprise, his mother said he could keep the pigeon, temporarily, because it was sick, and we were all strangers in the land of Egypt,<sup>3</sup> and it might not be bad for Aaron to have a pet. *Temporarily*.

The wing was surprisingly easy to fix, for the break showed clearly and Pidge was remarkably patient and still, as if he knew he was being helped. Or perhaps he was just exhausted from all the thrashing about he had done. Two Popsicle sticks served as splints, and strips from an old undershirt were used to tie them in place. Another strip held the wing to the bird's body.

Aaron's father arrived home and stared at the pigeon. Aaron waited for the expected storm. But instead, Mr. Kandel asked, "Who *did* this?" "Me," said Aaron. "And Noreen Callahan."

"Sophie!" he called to his wife. "Did you see this! Ten years old and it's better than Dr. Belasco could do. He's a genius!" •

As the days passed, Aaron began training Pidge to be a carrier pigeon. He tied a little cardboard tube to Pidge's left leg and stuck tiny rolled-up sheets of paper with secret messages into it: The Enemy Is Attacking at Dawn. Or: The Guns Are Hidden in the Trunk of the Car. Or: Vincent DeMarco Is a British Spy. Then Aaron would set Pidge down at one end of the living room and put some popcorn at the other end. And Pidge would waddle slowly across the room, cooing softly, while the ends of his bandages trailed along the floor.

At the other end of the room, one of Aaron's friends would take out the message, stick a new one in, turn Pidge around, and aim him at the popcorn that Aaron put down on his side of the room.

And Pidge grew fat and contented on all the popcorn and crumbs and corn and crackers and Aaron's grandmother's breakfast rolls.

Aaron had told all the children about Pidge, but he only let his very best friends come up and play carrier pigeon with him. But telling everyone had been a mistake. A group of older boys from down the block

# SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



Now a country in eastern Europe, Ukraine was under the rule of Russia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

#### G CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

What differences have you noticed between Aaron's family and Jerry's family in "President Cleveland, Where Are You?"

<sup>3.</sup> we were all ... Egypt: a Bible reference: "Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:19).

had a club—Aaron's mother called it a gang—and Aaron had longed to join as he had never longed for anything else. To be with them and share their secrets, the secrets of older boys. To be able to enter their clubhouse shack on the empty lot on the next street. To know the password and swear the secret oath. To belong. 

•

bout a month after Aaron had brought the pigeon home, Carl, the gang leader, walked over to Aaron in the street and told him he could be a member if he'd bring the pigeon down to be the club mascot. Aaron couldn't believe it; he immediately raced home to get Pidge. But his mother told Aaron to stay away from those boys, or else. And Aaron, miserable, argued with his mother and pleaded and cried and coaxed. It was no use. Not with those boys. No. 

10

Aaron's mother tried to change the subject. She told him that it would soon be his grandmother's sixtieth birthday, a very special birthday indeed, and all the family from Brooklyn and the East Side would be coming to their apartment for a dinner and celebration. Would Aaron try to build something or make something for Grandma? A present made with his own hands would be nice. A decorated box for her hairpins or a crayon picture for her room or anything he liked.

In a flash Aaron knew what to give her:
Pidge! Pidge would be her present! Pidge
with his wing healed, who might be able
to carry messages for her to the doctor
or his Aunt Rachel or other people his
grandmother seemed to go to a lot.
It would be a surprise for everyone.
And Pidge would make up for what had
happened to Grandma when she'd been
a little girl in the Ukraine, wherever that was.

#### **CONNECT**

Reread lines 98–105. What connection can you make to the desire Aaron expresses?

#### CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Reread lines 106–112. Who advises Jerry in "President Cleveland, Where Are You?" What difference do you find in the cultural and historical settings of the stories from these details?



La Colombe, Pablo Picasso. Embossed, cut out and painted copper, pencil strokes, 15¾" × 10¾". © 2008 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

would talk about the old days long ago in the Ukraine, in the same way that she talked to the birds on the back fire escape. She had lived in a village near a place called Kishinev<sup>4</sup> with hundreds of other poor peasant families like her own. Things hadn't been too bad under someone called Czar Alexander the Second,<sup>5</sup> whom Aaron always pictured as a tall handsome man in a gold uniform. But Alexander

ften, in the evening, Aaron's grandmother

<sup>4.</sup> **Kishinev** (kĭsh'ə-nĕf'): a city that is now the capital of the country of Moldova and is known today as Chisinau.

<sup>5.</sup> Czar (zär) Alexander the Second: emperor of Russia from 1855 to 1881.

the Second was <u>assassinated</u>, and Alexander the Third,<sup>6</sup> whom Aaron pictured as an ugly man in a black cape, became the czar. And the Jewish people of the Ukraine had no peace anymore.

One day, a thundering of horses was heard coming toward the village from the direction of Kishinev. "The Cossacks! The Cossacks!" someone had shouted. The czar's horsemen! Quickly, quickly, everyone in Aaron's grandmother's family had climbed down to the cellar through a little trap door hidden under a mat in the big central room of their shack. But his grandmother's pet goat, whom she'd loved as much as Aaron loved Pidge and more, had to be left above, because if it had made a sound in the cellar, they would never have lived to see the next morning. They all hid under the wood in the woodbin and waited, hardly breathing.

Suddenly, from above, they heard shouts and calls and screams at a list distance. And then the noise was in their house. Boots pounding on the floor, and everything breaking and crashing overhead. The smell of smoke and the shouts of a dozen men.

But they had been lucky. For other houses had been burned to the ground. And everywhere, not goats alone, nor sheep, but men and women and children lay quietly on the ground. The word for this sort of **massacre**, Aaron had learned, was *pogrom*. It had been a pogrom. And the men on the horses were Cossacks. Hated word. Cossacks.

nd so Pidge would replace that goat of long ago. A pigeon on Second Avenue where no one needed trap doors or secret escape passages or woodpiles to hide under. A pigeon for his grandmother's sixtieth birthday. Oh wing, heal quickly so my grandmother can send you flying to everywhere she wants!

But a few days later, Aaron met Carl in the street again. And Carl told Aaron that there was going to be a meeting that afternoon in which a map was going to be drawn up to show where a secret treasure lay buried on

#### assassinate

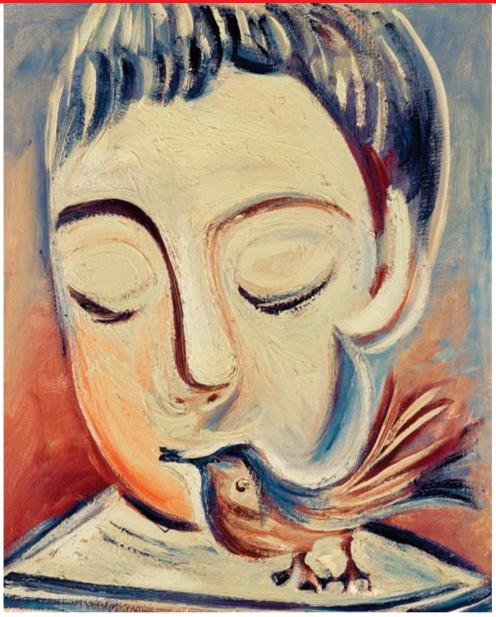
(ə-săs'ə-nāt') v. to murder by surprise attack for political reasons

# CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Why are the details about Aaron's grandmother important to the historical setting of the story?

massacre (măs'ə-kər) n. the act of killing a number of helpless humans or animals

<sup>6.</sup> Alexander the Third: emperor of Russia from 1881 to 1894.



Head with a Bird II (1971), Pablo Picasso. Oil on canvas, 55 cm × 46 cm. Private collection.

© Bridgeman Art Library © 2008 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

the empty lot. "Bring the pigeon and you can come into the shack. We got a badge for you. A new kinda membership badge with a secret code on the back."

Aaron ran home, his heart pounding almost as fast as the pigeon's. He took Pidge in his hands and carried him out the door while his mother was busy in the kitchen making stuffed cabbage, his father's favorite dish. And by the time he reached the street, Aaron had decided to take the bandages off. Pidge would look like a real pigeon again, and none of the older boys would laugh or call him a bundle of rags. ©

# **▲** Analyze Visuals

**Compare** this painting to your mental picture of Aaron and Pidge.

#### **G** CONNECT

Reread lines 167–183. Recall a time when you were invited to join something. Why do you think Aaron chooses to join the boys? Gently, gently he removed the bandages and the splints and put them in his pocket in case he should need them again. But Pidge seemed to hold his wing properly in place.

When he reached the empty lot, Aaron walked up to the shack, then hesitated. Four bigger boys were there. After a moment, Carl came out and commanded Aaron to hand Pidge over.

"Be careful," said Aaron. "I just took the bandages off."

"Oh sure, don't worry," said Carl. By now Pidge was used to people holding him, and he remained calm in Carl's hands.

"OK," said Carl. "Give him the badge." And one of the older boys handed Aaron his badge with the code on the back. "Now light the fire," said Carl.

"What . . . what fire?" asked Aaron.

"The fire. You'll see," Carl answered.

"You didn't say nothing about a fire," said Aaron. "You didn't say nothing to—"

"Hey!" said Carl. "I'm the leader here. And you don't talk unless I tell 200 you that you have p'mission. Light the fire, Al."

The boy named Al went out to the side of the shack, where some wood and cardboard and old newspapers had been piled into a huge mound. He struck a match and held it to the newspapers.

"OK," said Carl. "Let's get 'er good and hot. Blow on it. Everybody blow." Aaron's eyes stung from the smoke, but he blew alongside the others, going from side to side as the smoke shifted toward them and away.

"Let's fan it," said Al.

In a few minutes, the fire was crackling and glowing with a bright yellow-orange flame.

"Get me the rope," said Carl.

One of the boys brought Carl some cord and Carl, without a word, wound it twice around the pigeon, so that its wings were tight against its body.

"What . . . what are you *doing!*" shouted Aaron. "You're hurting his wing!"

"Don't worry about his wing," said Carl. "We're gonna throw him into the fire. And when we do, we're gonna swear an oath of loyalty to—"

"No! No!" shouted Aaron, moving toward Carl. 🖪

"Grab him!" called Carl. "Don't let him get the pigeon!"

But Aaron had leaped right across the fire at Carl, taking him completely by surprise. He threw Carl back against the shack and hit out at his face with both fists. Carl slid down to the ground, and the pigeon rolled out of his hands. Aaron scooped up the pigeon and ran, pretending he was on roller skates so that he would go faster and faster. And as he ran across the lot he

#### Language Coach

Derivations A new word formed by adding an affix to a base word is called a word derivation.

Careful (line 190) is a word derivation of the word care. Name two other words derived from the word care.

#### **H** CONNECT

Do you find Aaron's reaction to the boys' plan believable? Explain.

pulled the cord off Pidge and tried to find a place, *any* place, to hide him. But the boys were on top of him, and the pigeon slipped from Aaron's hands. "Get him!" shouted Carl.

Aaron thought of the worst, the most horrible thing he could shout at the boys. "Cossacks!" he screamed. "You're all Cossacks!"

Two boys held Aaron back while the others tried to catch the pigeon. Pidge fluttered along the ground just out of reach, skittering one way and then the other. Then the boys came at him from two directions. But suddenly Pidge beat his wings in rhythm, and rose up, up, over the roof of the nearest tenement, up over Second Avenue toward the park.

With the pigeon gone, the boys turned toward Aaron and tackled him to the ground and punched him and tore his clothes and punched him some more. Aaron twisted and turned and kicked and punched back, shouting "Cossacks! Cossacks!" And somehow the word gave him the strength to tear away from them. •

hen Aaron reached home, he tried to go past the kitchen quickly so his mother wouldn't see his bloody face and torn clothing. But it was no use; his father was home from work early that night and was seated in the living room. In a moment Aaron was surrounded by his mother, father, and grandmother, and in another moment he had told them everything that had happened, the words tumbling out between his broken sobs. Told them of the present he had planned, of the pigeon for a goat, of the gang, of the badge with the secret code on the back, of the shack, and the fire, and the pigeon's flight over the tenement roof.

And Aaron's grandmother kissed him and thanked him for his present which was even better than the pigeon.

"What present?" asked Aaron, trying to stop the series of sobs.

And his grandmother opened her pocketbook and handed Aaron her mirror and asked him to look. But all Aaron saw was his dirty, bruised face and his torn shirt.

Aaron thought he understood, and then, again, he thought he didn't. How could she be so happy when there really was no present? And why pretend that there was?

Later that night, just before he fell asleep, Aaron tried to imagine what his grandmother might have done with the pigeon. She would have fed it, and she certainly would have talked to it, as she did to all the birds, and . . . and then she would have let it go free. Yes, of course Pidge's flight to freedom must have been the gift that had made his grandmother so happy. Her goat has escaped from the Cossacks at last, Aaron thought, half dreaming. And he fell asleep with a smile.

# CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Reread lines 228–239. How does Aaron's calling the gang "Cossacks" relate to the cultural and historical setting of the work?

#### Comprehension

- 1. Recall What is Aaron doing when he finds the wounded pigeon?
- 2. Recall How do Aaron's parents react when he brings the pigeon home?
- 3. Summarize What happens when Aaron goes to the shack?

### COMMON CORE

**RL5** Analyze how a particular sentence fits into the structure of a text and contributes to the development of the setting.

#### **Text Analysis**

- **4. Interpret** What does Aaron's grandmother consider his gift to be? How does she communicate this view?
- **5. Connect** Aaron rejects the chance to join the club. Explain whether you find this rejection believable.
- 6. Analyze Cultural and Historical Setting How do the details about Aaron's grandmother's past contribute to the cultural and historical setting of the story?
- 7. Analyze Cultural and Historical Setting How can you tell that family members looked to each other for support during this time? Support your response with examples from the text.

#### **Comparing Cultural and Historical Settings**

Now that you have read "Aaron's Gift," finish filling in your chart. Then, compare the cultural and historical settings of the two works.

|                                 | "President Cleveland,<br>Where Are You?" | "Aaron's Gift"                  |
|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Time and Place                  | 1930s, during the Great<br>Depression    | Early 1900s in New York<br>City |
| Details of Historical<br>Period |  |                                 |
| Characters' Behavior            |  |                                 |

In what ways are the cultural and historical settings of the two works similar and different?

#### What would you do for your FAMILY?

In what ways do friends and relatives help you through difficult situations?

#### **Vocabulary in Context**

#### **▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE**

**Synonyms** are two or more words that have the same meaning. **Antonyms** are words that have opposite meanings. Decide whether the words in each pair are synonyms or antonyms.

- 1. skirmish/fight
- 2. massacre/slaughter
- 3. stalemate/progress
- 4. incredulous/believing
- 5. divulge/expose
- 6. contempt/admiration
- 7. allot/dispense
- 8. assassinate/kill
- 9. obsess/worry

#### **ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING**



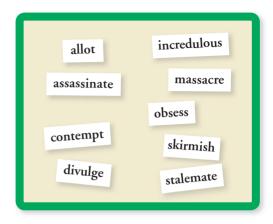
Think about the details you noted in your chart. How do the details in each story **create** a believable setting? Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

#### **VOCABULARY STRATEGY: CONTEXT CLUES**

**Context clues** may be found in the words, sentences, and paragraphs that surround an unknown word. These clues can help you interpret unfamiliar words and ideas in stories that you read. **Examples** are one type of context clue. Example clues are introduced by signal words like *such as, especially, including, like,* and *for example*.

**PRACTICE** Use the example clue to help you define each boldfaced word.

- 1. Look for a **periodical**, such as a weekly or monthly magazine.
- **2.** He was guilty of many **peccadillos**, including letting the screen door slam shut.
- 3. She was fond of quoting maxims like "Haste makes waste."
- 4. Elena loves crudités, especially celery sticks and baby carrots.



COMMON CORE

**L 4a** Use context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.



#### **Writing for Assessment**



#### 1. READ THE PROMPT

You've just read two stories set in the early twentieth century. In writing assessments, you will often be asked to compare and contrast two works in some way, such as two short stories set in the past.

In three paragraphs, compare the settings of "President Cleveland, Where Are You?" and "Aaron's Gift." Consider the time and place the stories are set and the details that are distinct to that cultural and historical period. Use details from the story that support your response.

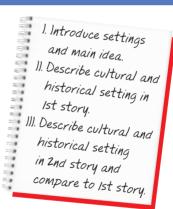
#### STRATEGIES IN ACTION

- I. I need to identify the similarities and differences between the two boys.
- I should include examples from the stories about the cultural and historical setting to support my ideas.

#### 2. PLAN YOUR WRITING

Using the chart you filled in as you read, identify the ways in which the cultural and historical settings are alike and different. Then think about how to present these similarities and differences.

- Decide on a main idea for your response.
- Review the stories to find details that support your ideas.
- Create an outline to organize your response. This sample outline shows one way to organize your paragraphs.



#### 3. DRAFT YOUR RESPONSE

Paragraph 1 Include the title and author of each story. State whether the cultural and historical settings of the stories are similar or different.

**Paragraph 2** Describe the cultural and historical setting of the first story. Identify the details that convey the cultural and historical period.

**Paragraph 3** Describe the cultural and historical setting of the second story. Identify the details that convey the cultural and historical period. Explain how the cultural and historical setting in the second story is similar to and different from the setting of the first story.

**Revision** Make sure you use correct verb tenses and pronoun cases throughout your writing.